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BABY PIGS

Big healthy litters are the result of rigid selection of parents and careful feeding of the sow.

By

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BABY PIGS

Approximately one-third of the pigs that are farrowed never reach market age. Such a high death loss might suggest the ravages of infectious diseases, such as cholera, enteritis, erysipelas, and influenza. As a matter of fact, a far greater percentage of deaths are due to causes other than infectious diseases, and most of them occur during the suckling period. Records of over 700 sows at Purdue University over a 15-year period indicate that between 25 and 30 per cent of all pigs farrowed die before weaning time.

The heavy death loss of baby pigs has three general causes:

1. Improper feeding and management of the brood sow during the gestation period, with the result that pigs are farrowed small and weak; or improper feeding of the sow after farrowing, especially during the first ten days.
2. Lack of protection for the pigs in the form of guard rails or pig brooders; or cold and drafty farrowing quarters.
3. Lack of sanitation and clean-up precautions before and after farrowing, so that specific infections are permitted a foothold.

Preparations for Farrowing

In preparation for farrowing, the houses or pens should be thoroughly cleaned with boiling lye water. This should be done several days in advance of the date the first sow is due to farrow, so that the quarters have time enough to dry out. One can of lye in 30 gallons of water is sufficient. The purpose of the lye is to help remove the dirt and oil that accumulates where hogs have been housed. Boiling water will destroy the eggs of the common roundworms that do so much damage in young pigs. It is a good plan to disinfect the farrowing quarters and all utensils as an added precaution against infection.

At least three days before farrowing, the sow should be brought in from range and thoroughly cleaned before she is put into her farrowing quarters. Wash the sow with a scrub brush and warm soap and water, and be especially sure that her udder is free from dirt.

Examine the sows quite carefully to see if there is any evidence of lice, the eggs of which are usually seen on the hair just back of the ears. Little pigs are quite susceptible, because lice prefer their tender skin. Control by dipping the sows in crude oil or crankcase drainings is advised during warm weather, but this practice is too dangerous in cold weather. Oil may be spread on the more severely infested spots with a paint brush, or a commercial louse powder may be sprinkled on.

Place the sow in her clean farrowing quarters and be sure there is enough clean bedding so that her udder is protected from the cold floor.

A fine bedding is preferable to a coarse bedding, because a sow has a tendency to work coarse bedding into a pile. Finely chopped straw, corn fodder, or crushed corn cobs have proven satisfactory.

Work with the sow in her new farrowing quarters, being careful that you treat her gently and kindly. This tends to keep her from being nervous and cross at farrowing time, and will permit working with her and the newly born pigs.

When a sow comes in from range and is confined for a few days there is a natural tendency for her to become constipated. This may affect the sow's milk and may in turn cause baby pig scours. To prevent constipation there are two or three things that can be done. Exercise will help, but that is not always possible; consequently the most usual controls are made through the feed. The corn in the ration should be reduced or entirely eliminated, and should be replaced with bulky feeds such as oats or bran.

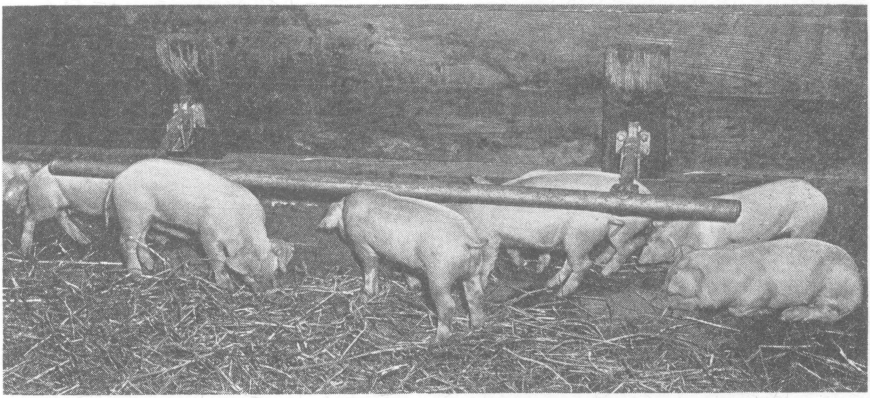

Fig. 1.—Guard rails are easy to build and will help to protect baby pigs.

If the constipation still persists, a tablespoon of glauber salts in the feed once a day will usually correct the trouble.

The Farrowing Period

Make the farrowing quarters as comfortable as possible. Individual houses can be made warmer in extremely cold weather by banking around them with straw or corn fodder. If the house is still cold at farrowing time it may be warmed by hanging a lantern in it, but be sure the lantern is securely fastened. Allow some ventilation or the moisture will condense and make the house damp.

When the sow is getting along all right it will probably be just as well to let her alone, although some men feel that they save more pigs by taking each one away as it is born and keeping it dry and warm until the sow is through farrowing.

When the pigs are with the sow they should have some means of protection. Guard rails spaced 10 inches from the floor and 8 to 10 inches from the side walls will give the pigs a safety zone in which to lie without being crushed by the sow.

The Value of Pig Brooders

Recently, pig brooders have been used very successfully in connection with guard rails. They are more practical where electricity is available, but can be used without. The brooders are built across one corner of the house or pen, with the hover from 10 to 12 inches above the floor. Brooders should be large enough so that the entire litter can get under at one time, and yet small enough so that the sow has plenty of room left in the pen to stretch out.

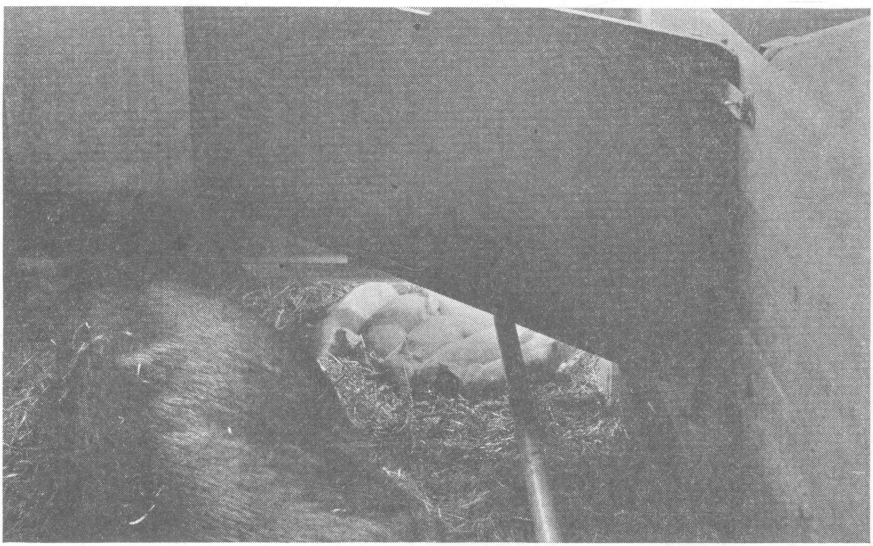

Fig. 2.—Electric pig brooders are pig savers. They prevent chilling, and in addition provide an area of safety for the pigs.

They may be heated with an electric light bulb and reflector, and because of the low ceiling are practically free from drafts. Some pigs find their way under the hover without help, but usually the litter must be put there once or twice. Little pigs soon learn that it is warmer under the hover and will stay there most of the time when they are not nursing. Not only does a brooder provide a safe place for the pigs, but records show that they gain faster.

One danger that should be guarded against is overheating. It is possible to make hothouse plants out of small pigs so that they catch cold when they are turned out on range. This may be avoided by gradually hardening the pigs to outside temperature.

Even without electricity the brooders have been found to be of value Because of the small air space the body heat of the litter will keep the temperature several degrees warmer than the rest of the pen A jug of hot water, a warm soapstone, or hot bricks wrapped in sacks, and put under the hover, will provide heat for newly born pigs

Clip Needle Teeth of Newly Farrowed Pigs

Very young pigs should be watched to see that each one gets to suckle Very often two pigs will each decide that one teat is his special property, and patience is required to see that one of them does not starve

Little pigs are born with temporary tusks or needle teeth, and since a pig is a natural fighter it is advisable to clip these very sharp teeth, so that the pigs do not injure each other or the sow's udder Lacerations on the sow's teats may cause her to become restless and may be the reason for her getting up and down so often when the pigs are trying to nurse The more often a sow does this, the more pigs will be crushed or stepped on Occasionally a sow's udder becomes so sore that she refuses to let the pigs nurse with the result that she dries up and the pigs starve The lacerations also make a good port of entry for infection

Ear Mark the Pigs

Little pigs should be ear marked so that it is possible to identify each one This is the only sure way of making a sensible selection of future breeding stock Pigs can be ear marked at the same time the needle teeth are clipped

Feeding the Sow

It is usually advisable to withhold all feed from a sow for 24 hours after she farrows Water should be before her at all times, and in extremely cold weather it should be heated enough to take the chill off

Beginning one day after farrowing, the sow can be given a light feed of something bulky and cooling, such as oats or bran, or a mixture of the two The amount can be gradually increased, and beginning the fourth or fifth day some corn may be added Watch the pigs carefully for any signs of scours, and cut down on the feed if any occurs Sows with average sized litters can be brought up to full feed in 10 or 12 days, and can be placed on a self-feeder at any time after that

Start Pigs on Feed Early

Little pigs will start to nose around in feed when they are quite young They should be encouraged, because the quicker they start, the easier it is to put on rapid gains and the setback at weaning time is less severe

Most successful hog men provide a creep for the pigs so that they can eat independently of the sows. Recent experiments would indicate that this is not necessary, so far as rate of gain is concerned. In fact, there is some indication that pigs will learn to eat at an earlier age where they feed along with the sows. However, there are usually more lame and crippled pigs as a result of feeding together, because sows will step on more pigs under this system.

Immune and Castrate Early

Boar pigs for market should be castrated just as early in life as the operator can get the job done. Pigs under 2 weeks of age show a very slight setback, and the job is not difficult after a little practice.

There is a wide variance of opinion as to the proper age to immunize pigs. However, due to the fact that enteritis is so widely distributed, and because we have so many outbreaks of that disease about 10 days after vaccination, it has been found advisable to immunize all pigs at least 10 days before they are weaned. A pig of 5 or 6 weeks of age is usually on an ideal diet of sow's milk and grain, and he is more healthy and resistant to infection than he is immediately after weaning. Certainly, it is not advisable to immunize pigs and wean them immediately. The reaction from hog cholera vaccination is at its height from 7 to 10 days after the operation, and since weaning itself is a shock to the pig the double setback often lowers the pig's resistance just enough for enteritis to gain a foothold.

Watch for Anemia

In spite of frequent warnings, there are many pigs that die each year from anemia. It is caused, generally, by a lack of iron in the pigs' diet, and occurs when they are confined on wood or concrete. It may occur in pigs of any age, but is commonly noticed in pigs from 1 to 2 weeks old. White pigs show the symptoms first in paleness of the skin, especially on the ears. Since paleness cannot be noticed in colored pigs, the disease often becomes quite advanced before the herdsman is aware that anything is wrong. In the later stages pigs become rough-haired, the skin is wrinkled, the backs arched, bellies distended, and the pigs breathe in gasps or jerks. This is the stage called "thumps," and death may follow rather abruptly.

Anemia does not occur when pigs are on pasture, or where they can root in the soil. They obtain enough iron in that way to prevent the disease. When pigs are confined the trouble can be prevented by putting a box of sod in the pen for the pigs to root in. Be careful that the sod is not taken from contaminated hog lots, or parasites will be sure to cause damage at a later period.

Another method of control is to paint an iron solution on the sow's udder once or twice a day. This solution can be made up by dissolving ½ pound of copperas in 1 quart of water. Some hogmen mix molasses with

the solution so that the material will stick to the sow's udder, and also as a preventive for the so-called "baby pig disease." This practice has some merit, no doubt; one disadvantage is, it causes the bedding to adhere to the udder.

Prevent Parasites

A statement has been made that pigs fed a balanced ration of sufficient quantity, and raised in such a way that they have no chance to pick up roundworm eggs, are about 90 per cent raised. Two systems can be used to prevent parasites. Under one system the pigs are farrowed in individual houses, on rotation pasture where hogs have not run for a year, and the pigs kept there until they weigh 100 pounds.

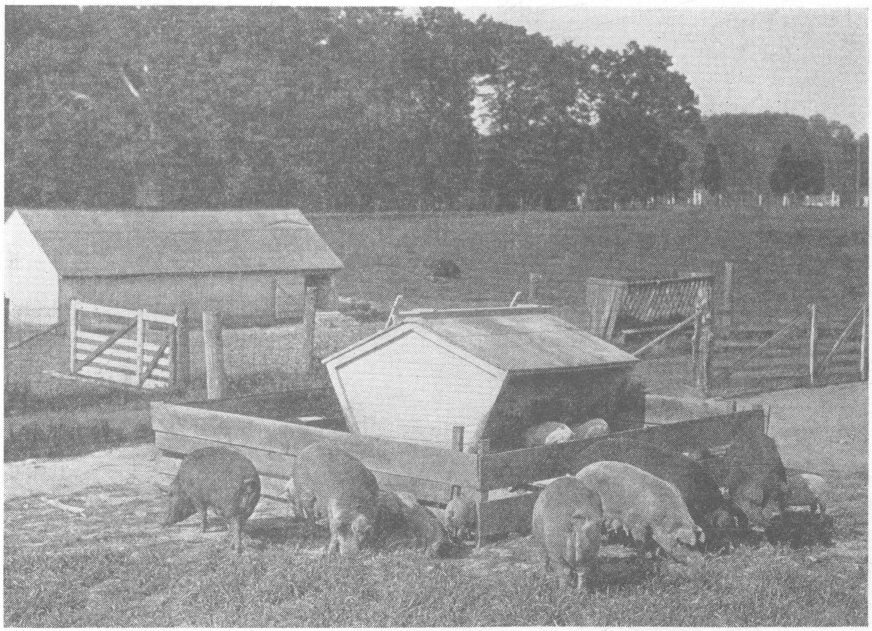

Fig. 3.—A pig creep with self-feeder.

The other system involves the use of a central farrowing house, and the pigs are later moved to a clean rotation pasture. This system permits better attention at farrowing time, but requires extra labor to be sure that diseases and parasites do not get a start. The sows and pigs must be hauled to pasture, because it is practically impossible to drive them without using lots or lanes where hogs have run.

The objection to a sanitation program is the labor involved, but over a period of years more pounds of pork will be marketed per hours of labor spent, than where hogs are raised in lots close to the hog house.

A ration suitable for the sows during the suckling period is also suitable for the pigs, with the exception that corn should be ground for very young pigs The most popular ration is made up as follows

Cracked corn	65 lbs
Medium ground wheat	20 lbs
40% protein supplement	15 lbs
	100 lbs

In this ration, ground barley may be used to replace a part or all of the corn, and ground oats or wheat middlings may be used to replace the wheat Occasionally, oat hulls prove irritating to the stomach and intestines of baby pigs and it may be necessary to sift them out For brood sows the corn may be fed as ear corn, and the small grain and protein supplement mixed and fed in a self feeder

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